



PRESS RELEASE

WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS PROMOTE A STRONGER ROLE FOR WOMEN IN NATIONAL GOVERNANCE

DHAKA, JULY 11 -- The South Asia Women Parliamentarians Conference ended in Dhaka today following three days of intensive discussion on issues related to women's empowerment in the socio-political arena. The closing ceremony was marked by a common declaration on women's political leadership in South Asia that underlined the need for continuing advocacy for change and exchange in the region regarding role of women's participation in politics. The conference also launched a regional network and secretariat among women parliamentarians from South Asia that will provide opportunities for dialogue and serve as a regional coordination center for future activities supporting women MPs from the seven participating countries.

Members of parliament from seven South Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), representatives from political parties, civil society and some of the world's leading gender experts attended the conference. They highlighted the continuing gender inequality in parliaments and potential solutions to these enduring trends.

Speaking at the closing ceremony, Ambassador Dan Mozena remarked, "The bonds, networks, friendships you have built over these past days will provide continuing opportunities to share experiences and learn from one another. You now belong to a network of women MPs committed to promoting women's political leadership and governance ..."

Conference participants highlighted that women leaders must have access to decision-making positions and a more gender-sensitive working environment. Participants stressed the need for encouraging and engaging women in the decision-making process. Delegates from the region agreed that more needs to be done to enforce the rights of women in equal representation in the political process and ensuring that politics is open to all.

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION**

TEL: 880-2-883-7150-4 FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: DhakaPA@state.gov WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>

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State Minister of Women and Children Affairs Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh Ambassador Dan Mozena, USAID/ Bangladesh Mission Director Richard Greene, and BRAC University Vice Chancellor Ainun Nishat, were present at the closing ceremony. The conference was organized by The Asia Foundation and funded by the U.S. Government, through USAID, and the United Kingdom through DFID.

The U.S. Government, through USAID, has provided over \$5.8 billion in development assistance to Bangladesh since 1971. In 2011 alone, USAID provided more than \$180 million to improve the lives of people in Bangladesh. USAID supports programs in Bangladesh that: promote democratic institutions and practices, expand food security and economic opportunity, improve health and education services, and increase resiliency to climate change through adaptation and low carbon development.

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